I am the Emergency Coordinator for the Boone County, MO ARES organization and use various digital modes in the ham radio hobby to assist in providing the county the best support from our ham community as possible. I participate in the DHS NCC SHARES HF Radio Program. Our ARES club provides through our Emergency Communications Center (Boone County OEM), Winlink access on HF and VHF. We seek to be prepared for emergencies and disasters that may occur locally and nationally. This requires use of modern digital modes in our ham radio bands, as allowed and licensed by the FCC. We long for the FCC's change to Part 97 that would allow faster data rates that would encourage our young hams to apply their IT skills into their ham radio hobby, as they are quite capable. (And allow us to join the rest of the world in the data mode capabilities). Recall the response to the recent disasters from SHARES and ARES operations that suspended the rules, so that Pactor 4 could be used here. How embarrassing that our highly technical nation lags the rest of the developed world in this digital limitation.

I see that some opponents to the change in rules are suggesting that there is a national security threat created with these digital modes that are hard for the average ham to monitor. I submit to you that the "average" ham cannot "decode" a 20 WPM CW net either, but we wouldn't want to require those proficient with CW to slow down their communications so that most of us could decode it. Encryption of information with these digital modes is not occurring for obscuring the information, but for the faster, more efficient transmission of the information. We do not order a pizza (or an AR-15) in a Winlink message, but when the Red Cross wants to know the occupancy of Shelter A with names and phone numbers, they will appreciate an Excel file sent and received without error in a Winlink message from the Shelter to our EOC by ham radio because there is no Internet due to the current disaster. We need these digital modes and faster data rates in our ham bands so we can experiment and find methods to provide the best service we can to our communities in times of need, because we can, if you let us.

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